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Idealized Cognitive Models, Typicality Effects, Translation

With every change of location we find ourselves in a different cultural and spiritual zone, lugging our personal and national baggage along.

(Janusz Cyran)[1]

1. The "Cultural Turn" in Translation Studies

The perennial debate on the place of Translation Studies (TS) within the matrix of scholarly disciplines, which is often seen as a rivalry between two potential "hosts," i.e. linguistics and literature, abated after some TS scholars, and notably Mary Snell-Hornby in her seminal article on "cultural approach" (1990), successfully argued for a radical move from text to culture as the unit of translation. Defining the "translation unit" in terms of culture rather than in terms of lexicon, morphology or syntax was a step far more revolutionary than an earlier passage from "word" to "text." As the result, what Snell-Hornby called "linguistic transcoding" has become "cultural transfer," and the role of the translator came to be seen as that of "mediator between cultures" rather than "code-switcher." In terms of the translator's professional competence, it was then postulated that, "[s]ince languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 11).

In effect, TS theorists no longer talk about "equivalence" as a measure of faithfulness (or "goodness") of a translation. Instead, they are inclined to evoke Eugene Nida's classical notion of "functional equivalence," whereby a particular translation may be called "equivalent" to the original if its functioning in the target culture is the same as the function that the original performs in the source culture. For all practical purposes, the "sameness" is taken here to mean (a certain degree of) "similarity": "sameness" *sensu stricto* is tantamount to "identity" – a goal unattainable by definition.

[1] Transl. Agnieszka Pokojska.

The changed approach requires a changed understanding of crucial terms. In particular, how should we define culture? And, depending on the answer, what should now be our definition of untranslatability? Among scores of proposals offered by scores of authors, the general definition of culture as "a network of discursive meanings" (cf. Sadza 2011) seems relevant as a point of departure for contemporary TS. All embracing as it is, it gives due justice to the role of both individual contexts and the complex interrelations that hold between them.

What, then, is (un)translatability? The "cultural turn" in TS seems to implicate a notion most similar to what Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa calls "absolute untranslatability": "irreconcilable differences of collective social identity between the group of recipients of the original text in its source language and the target group of recipients of the translation in the target language." In Bałuk-Ulewiczowa's view these "irreconcilable differences" create "insurmountable, absolute barriers" (2000: 173–4), which even the most proficient translator can neither avoid nor remove. While this type of untranslatability is justly called "absolute" from the point of view of the translator, the barriers are obviously relative from the point of view of a TS theorist. They are culture-sensitive and culture-bound: "collective social identities" are created by, and based upon, inventories of interdependent discoursive meanings.

Of course, defining untranslatability in terms of differences between the source and the target audiences is not a new idea, and the list of works that deal with the subject is too long and too well-known to be quoted at this point. It is not the aim of this essay to add yet another voice to the chorus. What seems worthwhile, however, is to observe that the cultural turn in TS runs parallel to an analogous cultural turn in linguistics. Further down, I would like to demonstrate how these two parallel cultural turns make TS and linguistics meet on the *terra communis* primarily delimited and administered by cultural studies. The meeting might prove profitable for both sides: TS might acquire an additional – and fairly precise – instrument of analysis and thus alleviate the accusation of excessive impressionism, while linguistics could gain a wider perspective upon contrasts brought up by inter- and intralinguistic translation, and thus alleviate the accusation of rampant relativism.

2. The "Cultural Turn" and Cognitive Linguistics

Abandoning the view whereby language could be best described as a system of algorithmic rules, contemporary linguistics, and notably the theories

subsumed under the umbrella term of "cognitivism," tends to assume that a realistic view upon language and its grammar requires that they be seen as an inventory of means used to express relationships that hold within a network of discoursive meanings, characteristic of a collective social identity. This assumption underlies the model of language advocated and developed by one of the "cognitivisms," i.e. the theory of language and language use known as cognitive linguistics (CL).

The cultural turn in linguistics, and notably in CL, means a change of some fundamental assumptions. Most significantly, words and structures are seen to refer not to things and processes in the surrounding world such as they **are**, but as they **seem to be** to a cognizant mind of a human observer. It follows that there is no knowledge without a knower, as all observation requires Hegel's observing intelligence. Meaning becomes tantamount to conceptualization, and since every particular conceptualization is created by a particular conceptualizer, inherent subjectivity of meaning(s) becomes an obvious tenet that both a philosopher of phenomenological persuasion and a linguist of CL orientation have to live and cope with. The subjectivity results from the constantly changing multiple perspectives of observation, which makes us see the Aristotelian accidents of things, but not the real, or the substance. In their attempt to resolve the problem of cognition and knowledge, which strives "to recognize that things are not as they seem, but that beyond and through the seeming we can apprehend that which really is, the one force through manifold expression" (Caird 2005: 168), linguists – like scientists – refer to the concept of intersubjectivity. An abstraction from a number of subjective meanings, intersubjectivity becomes part of Bałuk-Ulewiczowa's "collective social identity," or the "one force through manifold expression," or – ultimately – a "network of discoursive meanings," that is, culture.

Among theoretical varieties of CL, the sociocultural dimension of language (use), figures most prominently in what has become known as "Polish cognitive studies." The so-called "Lublin school of cognitive ethnolinguistics" develops the theory of linguistic view of the world, created and propagated by Jerzy Bartmiński and his followers (Bartmiński 2009). Although focusing mainly on dialectal varieties of contemporary Polish, the Lublin school has convincingly shown how sociocultural factors influence, and often become decisive for, the meaning of words that build up the lexicon. In the context of interlingual translation, typical for TS discussions and analyses, analogous observations appear in the disguise of cultural untranslatability. With reference to material culture, this type of untranslatability is shown to occur whenever the lack of a linguistic label results from the lack of a potential referent in one

of the two cultures that come into contact in translation. A standard example is the famous *bigos*, commonly claimed to be "untranslatable" for anyone and everyone coming from outside of the Polish culinary culture. In general, the "realia" have the monopoly over cultural untranslatability.

CL goes a step further with its concept of Idealised Cognitive Models (ICMs), first proposed by George Lakoff in his seminal monograph on cognitive semantics (Lakoff 1987). An ICM is defined as a relatively stable mental representation of some part or aspect of the world. Although similar to the classical notion of semantic field, which figures prominently in traditional linguistic semantics and in literary theoretical interpretations (cf. e.g. Biegajło 2011: 113), it is more complex structurally. While a semantic field involves a two dimensional arrangement of connotations associated with a given lexeme, an ICM is a hierarchical array of semantic and pragmatic subcategories, with every level within the hierarchy constituting a radial category whose peripheral members are arranged at varying distances from the category-central prototype. To quote a classical example, the category referred to by the English noun *bachelor* comprises in its ICM such concepts as marriage and young (though adult) age: "a *bachelor* is simply an unmarried adult man" (Lakoff 1987: 70). In short, the features of being an adult man and being unmarried constitute the category prototype. An ICM is idealized over a range of individual experiences and as a rule, organized in terms of particular image schemas, which are very abstract conceptual representations of various aspects of the world. They do not include any details. For instance, the model of *travelling* is organized in terms of the tripartite image schema, conventionally represented – and written – as SOURCE-PATH-GOAL. Its dynamic meaning results from the inherent dynamism of the schema.

ICMs can be either general or cultural (cf. Radden and Kovesces 1996: 21). While *travelling* is an obvious candidate for the first group, *bachelor* is clearly culture-bound. For instance, the ICM functioning in European culture does not include such elements as priesthood or Muslim faith. In our culture the category labeled "an unmarried young man" will thus be a better representative of the category *bachelor* than, for instance, the pope or a Moslem who has just one wife (Lakoff 1987: 70).

Two conclusions follow.

First, unlike models based on lexical meanings of individual elements of the lexicon, as in semantic fields or linguistic pictures of the world, ICMs are not restricted to nominal reference. They can – and often do – involve relations between things (e.g. the ICM *to belong*) or processes (as in the ICM *travelling*). One could then legitimately suppose that he scope of "realia" might

in fact go far beyond inventories of elements exemplified by such classics as *barszcz* or *bigos*.

Second, ICMs are inherently metonymic. To refer once again to Lakoff's classical example, technically speaking, the pope is a bachelor, it is just that his existence is not prominently acknowledged – in our culture – by the relative ICM. Similarly, while *travelling* includes the notion of using camels as means of locomotion, in our culture the ICM does not make reference to this particular means of transportation. Moreover, since "metonymic processes are not restricted to reference" (Radden and Kovecses 1996: 21), a dynamic ICM often metonymically omits some (communicatively less relevant) stages of the process. For example, we normally say *he came to the conclusion* though the actual achievement follows a number of earlier activities: gathering relevant information, reasoning, selecting, deciding. This type of metonymy accounts for such constructs as social stereotypes, ideals, paragons and salient or typical examples.[2]

As can be seen from the above example, salience conditions the selection of those parts of a given ICM that merit explicit reference: actual coming to a conclusion is cognitively more salient than the process of getting there. But cultural preferences play an equally important role (cf. Radden and Kovecses 1996: 48–50). Both factors – the cognitive and the cultural – account for what has been described as typicality effects: due to metonymy, some elements of an ICM come to the fore, gaining the status of prototypes within their categories.

The concept of ICM functions within the framework of CL; it has not been discussed – at least explicitly – in the context of TS. However, the opposition between general and cultural ICMs as well as motivation behind typicality effects seem highly relevant to both fields. The "insurmountable differences of collective social identities" can often be described as culture bound discrepancies between ICMs that at first sight seem fairly general but which soon reveal their cultural character.

3. ICMs and translation

The inherently metonymic character of ICMs finds its counterpart in earlier, pragmatic theories of language, where the difference between "the said" and "the unsaid" was defined as the opposition between propositions and presuppositions (see e.g. Levinson 1983).[3] Under other names, the notion is of course

[2] For a discussion of different types of metonymic ICM's, see Evans 2009, *passim*.

[3] In cognitive grammar, an analogous opposition underlies Langacker's claim concerning metonymy. According to Langacker, semantics is largely indeterminate and grammar is basically

familiar also to literary scholars. In the reception of linguistic messages – and literary texts in particular – the unsaid, or the "missing" parts of metonymic ICMs, are referred to as "reading between the lines," the mechanism that "instinctively sets in motion a list of associations and facts" (Biegajło 2011: 121; transl. E.T.) It is these associations and facts that constitute what was defined above as mental representations. But the ICMs which are "instinctively set in motion" belong to the **source** culture. The corresponding **target** culture ICM can be misleadingly similar, but is never the same, and the "cultural and historical differences . . . create a barrier which cuts off the **interlinear** space from the readers of the translation" (Biegajło 2011: 124; transl. E.T.; emphasis in the original).

Cultural differences belong to the sphere of shared social identities, shaped by collective cognition and most frequently revealed on the level of (metonymic) ICMs, while overall principles that govern human cognition, revealed as abstract image schemas, are largely universal. It follows that cultural untranslatability results from discrepancies between culturally determined ICMs. An illustrative example comes from a recent interview with David Fincher, director of the American screen version of Larsson's *Millenium*. Fincher says:

> At times Larsson treated aspects of the Swedish specificity as being to obvious to describe, but these things seem far from obvious to a foreigner. For instance, in Sweden doors typically open inwards. So an American audience will picture the scene in which a stranger pays an unexpected visit to Salander quite differently: for them, there must have been an earlier brief exchange with the door ajar and secured by a chain. But in Sweden an intruder can simply burst into the flat . . . (Orliński 2012, transl. E.T.)

An American translation of the Swedish description of that scene will have the doors opening outwards, with all the resulting changes in interpretation. The readers of the translation will then create their own interpretation of the translator's interpretation of the original writer's interpretation of the movements (and intentions) of Salander's visitor.

The following section presents a similar case: the doors to freedom will be shown to open just for a second in the original, and stay ajar in the translation. With all the resulting changes in interpretation.

With units of translation defined as words or sentences, the work of a TS scholar was certainly much easier than it is today. The shift from words to texts

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metonymic, which means that "explicit linguistic coding gets us in the right neighbourhood . . . but from there we have to find the right address by some other means" (Langacker 2009: 46). In short, language can be compared to a user's guide, or an operation manual.

to cultures requires that texts should be analysed in their entirety, in their maximally wide and maximally complete cultural contexts. This assumption makes poetry a natural candidate for selection if one intends to illustrate problems involved in translation. Not only is it "a history and science of feeling" (Helen Vendler, in Lipska 1996: xxiii), but it offers an inspiring combination of a succinct form with freedom of interpretation. The less is said, the more remains unsaid and left to interpretation.

An analysis of a text – in the original and in the translation – within the framework offered by the theory of ICMs will not reveal spectacular results, hitherto unknown and unsuspected. But, hopefully, it will confirm and refine the interpreter's insights and intuitions.

4. Case study: Ewa Lipska: *Obywatel małego kraju / The citizen of a small country*

The poem, first published in 1986, was written in the 80's of the 20th century. The opening lines run as follows:

> Obywatel małego kraju
> urodzony nierozważnie na skraju Europy
> powołany zostaje do rozmyślań o wolności.
> Jako rezerwista nigdy się nad tym nie zastanawiał.
> Przerywa poranne karmienie wieloryba.
> Wertuje słowniki.
> **Parę razy w życiu**
> **przejeżdżał przez wolność tranzytem**.
> **Czasami zjadał lunch**
> **i wypijał szklaneczkę soku pomarańczowego**
> (Lipska 2003: 8, emphasis E.T.)

The three ICMs that will be focused upon further in this discussion are:

1. "przejeżdżać tranzytem" ("go via/through . . . ")
2. "jeść lunch" ("eat lunch")
3. "wypijać szklaneczkę soku pomarańczowego" ("drink a glass of orange juice")

4.1. Transit

The "transit ICM" is organized around the general image schema referred to in the literature as "source-path-goal image schema of locomotion" (Evans 2009: 108–9). The schematic meaning, convergent with all the specific models, corresponds to the etymological source of the word: the past participle *transitus*, derived from the Latin verb *transire* – "to go across." On this general level the meanings of the English noun and its Polish counterpart are identical. But on the more specified levels, there are several kinds of transit. As evidenced by standard dictionaries, the central case – both in English and in Polish – includes passage or conveyance of goods or people from one place (source) along a given route (path) to another place (goal). The central case for the action referred to in Polish as *przejeżdżanie tranzytem* and in English as "going via/through . . ." involves the act of passing over, across, or through, and – by metonymical extension – the passage.

But there are other cases, less central (but relevant for the understanding of Lipska's poem), such as:

a) the act of going from one country to another, just once, and passing over, across or through a third country without being allowed to get off the means of transport or stop over, with a meticulous document and luggage control carried out on the two borders. The single passage has to be legitimized by relevant authorities; getting the permission tends to be difficult, and the length of passage is strictly limited by regulations (P: *jechać/przejeżdżać tranzytem*, E: ???);

b) the act of going from one country to another and passing over, across or through a third country without wishing to stop over for a longer time (E: "go via/through . . .," P: *przejeżdżać przez . . .*);

c) the act of changing flights and spending the time interval at an airport without having to go through the customs or passport control (E: "transit passenger(s)," P: *pasażer(owie) podróżujący tranzytem*).

Due to the phenomenon of typicality effects, in "pre-1989" Poland it was the model a) that was selected as representative of the entire category *przejeżdżać tranzytem*; the (majority of) Poles simply did not know any other sub-models of the category. By contrast, the judgement of representativeness made by native speakers of English would result in choosing model c) as the representative subcategory. The discrepancy is reflected by the expressions conventionalized in the two languages. In the "pre-1989" Polish *przejeżdżać*

tranzytem refers to subcategory a); there is no expression (*ergo* no category) for b), and category c) is a calque translation of the English expression "transit passenger(s)": *pasażer(owie) podróżujący tranzytem*.

4.2. Lunch

The "lunch ICM" is organized around the general image schemas "object" (lunch) and "process" (eat/have lunch). In English, the central case is a meal eaten during the midday break in a working day, between breakfast (in the morning) and dinner (at night). Other, less central, cases, include, for instance:

a) cold meal, packed and taken from home to be eaten at work or at school (E: "packed/box lunch," P: *drugie śniadanie*);

b) warm meal eaten in a restaurant by a group of formally dressed people discussing business (E: "business lunch," P: *obiad służbowy*).

In the text under discussion, non-central categories, such as models b) or c) above, will be excluded by the context. The typicality effect, reflected in the lexical borrowing *lunch/lancz,* will be motivated by the single aspect of the ICM shared by the two cultures: the time of the day. The Polish central case does not include the feature "break in a working day" and thus comes closest to the "native" ICM of *obiad*. On the other hand, it includes the feature which is explicitly formulated in the Wikipedia definition of the "lunch ICM": "In Western countries, where work begins at 9.00, breakfast is eaten later, and at 12.00 or 13.00 hours people eat lunch . . . **The term used mostly in English-speaking countries**" (transl. and emphasis E.T.).[4] In short, the Polish "lunch ICM" includes the feature "element of Western culture." [5]

4.3. Orange juice

In its category-central variety, the "orange juice ICM" is similar in both cultures. However, while the English variant includes the feature "staple drink commonly drunk at breakfast," it is absent from the Polish ICM (at least in its "pre-1989" form); instead, in the Polish central case there is "a luxury drink,

[4] Wikipedia (Web. 15 Feb. 2012. <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunch>) is consulted – and quoted – as representative for folk (naïve) rather than expert (scholarly) models. It is the latter kind that is relevant for the present discussion.

[5] Which – with reference to different cultures – naturally motivates linguistic borrowings in general.

drunk at special occasions." It is the discrepancy between the two ICMs that is crucial for the overall meaning of the poem.

4.4. The English translation

In the English translation[6] the fragment under discussion is rendered as follows:

> The citizen of a small country
> born imprudently at Europe's edge
> is called upon to meditate on freedom.
> As a reservist he never thought much about it.
> He interrupts the morning feeding of a whale.
> And peruses dictionaries.
> A few times in his life
> **he travelled through freedom in passing.**
> **Sometimes he had lunch**
> **and drank a glass of orange juice**
> (Lipska 1996: 231, emphasis E.T.)

Although the original metonymy ("freedom" for "free countries") is preserved, the three crucial ICMs are replaced by their English counterparts. Because in none of the three cases the context implies typicality effects, the ICMs will be naturally interpreted as representing central cases. In the English version of the poem, Lipska's "citizen of a small country" remembers the few occasions on which he travelled through free Europe, without deeper reflection on big (freedom, *tranzyt*) and small (lunch, orange juice) differences between "West" and "East."

According to Krystyna Pisarkowa, the divide between "the Western world" and "us," or "Europe" and "us," is one of the basic "codes" of Polish contemporary lyrical poetry (Pisarkowa 1990: 338). It is also the main theme of Lipska's poem. Her traveller, a *stłamszony zwierzak wypuszczony z klatki* ("a suppressed animal, let out of its cage," Cyran n.d.), reflects on freedom, which he had been allowed to see "in passing," and gets its taste, symbolized by the taste of "lunch" and "orange juice."

In the English version, the "animal" is still pondering upon "freedom," but his experience is that of a citizen of the "post-1989" Europe – a transit passenger, he goes through free countries in passing, and reaches his country of

[6] Published in 1996 (Lipska 1996: 230–3).

destination – a reality he shares with its citizens – where he eats his lunch and drinks his orange juice like everybody else.

At this point the question, posed at the beginning of the essay, has to be asked again: is Lipska's poem untranslatable? The answer seems to be that before the political, social, and cultural changes that took place in Poland (and in other "small countries" "at Europe's edge") after 1989, it certainly was. The respective ICMs differed significantly as expressions of different "collective social identities," resulting from differences between the two worlds.

The English translation, published in 1996, was most probably made at a time when these differences were already much less pronounced. The two worlds became less distant, and the respective ICMs more convergent. Typicality effects of "eastern" ICMs became parallel to typicality effects of the ICMs of the "West." Hence translation should become easier, and the English translation should come closer to the Polish text.

At this point, a few pertinent questions can be legitimately asked. Is Bałuk-Ulewiczowa's "absolute untranslatability" indeed absolute, or is it relative? In other words, can a text that was considered untranslatable in a given sociocultural context become translatable when the context changes? Can the translation which is, in traditional terms, equivalent to its original, still fail to be faithful? If Grol's translation is – today – considered faithful, what is it faithful to?

5. Conclusions

To state at this point that equivalence (in a most general sense) is a myth would be absolutely trivial. It is perhaps a little less trivial to say that the criterion that has replaced it, that is that of "faithfulness," can be defined in terms of the CL theory of ICMs. In fact, without necessarily using the term, TS scholars talk about "missing ICMs" whenever they point to "missing realia" (cf. the casus *bigos*). Pointing out such gaps has rightly deserved the label of "old hat." What is perhaps more interesting is a situation in which a general ICM is present in two (or more) cultures, but within the general model typicality effects are shaped differently in different cultures. Such was the case presented above.

The discrepancies can be synchronic, involving varieties of subcategories that are present in different cultures at the same time, but they can also be diachronic. Typical effects are dynamic, they change under the influence of political, social, and cultural changes. Diachronic shifts within general models can occur across cultures, but also within the same culture. Since they are culturally defined, they have to be learned (cf. Lakoff 1987: 84). The "cultural turn"

requires that entities defined as texts be given discursive meanings, which are always the result of an interpretation. Interpretations change according to the actually binding sets of ICMs (i.e. the network of meanings called "culture"). And because of the dynamics, new culture-sensitive interpretations appear also within the same language. In this sense, interlingual translation is just one special case.

Lipska's poem was untranslatable in 1980's because it was not possible to find English words to express Polish cultural ICMs of the time. And it appears untranslatable today, because it offers a rendering of Polish cultural ICMs of today. So, perhaps the cultural untranslatability is absolute after all? One thing remains indisputable: paradoxically, Renata Grol's "The Citizen . . ." is a faithful translation of today's intersubjective "native" interpretation of the discursive meaning of the original poem.

As shown above, the notions of ICM and typicality effects, as proposed by CL, can become useful both for an analysis of texts (and literary texts in particular) and their translations. It can perhaps be used to refine distinctions made by literary scholars between "interpretations" and "overinterpretations." On the other hand, an analysis of strategies and solutions chosen by translators can feed linguistic thought on the nature and structuring of general and cultural ICMs. Such cross feeding might perhaps prevent both disciplines from sharing the pessimistic view, according to which "authors and their texts die together with their contemporaries" (Cyran 2011).

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